Meditation of Patriarch Pierbattista Pizzaballa: Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B, 2021

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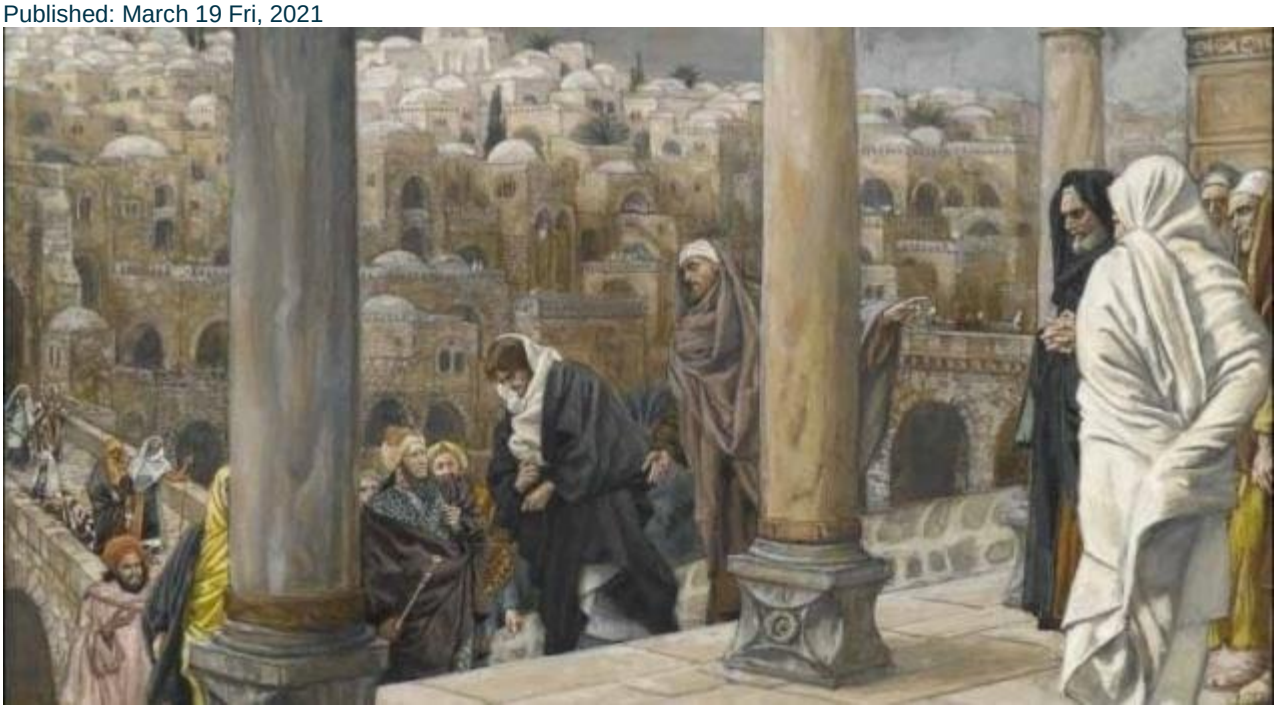

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March 21, 2021

Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B

With today's Gospel passage we move to chapter 12 of John.

By now, we are in the proximity of the passion, which begins at chapter 13 with the last supper of Jesus with His disciples. In chapter 12, instead, we find the event of Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet (vv. 1-11) and then the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (vv.12-19). The latter piece ends with a dejected and annoyed reflection by the Pharisees, who seem resigned to the "success" of Jesus: "the Pharisees said to one another, "Do you see that you are gaining nothing? Look, the whole world has gone after him!" (Jn 12:19).

Today's Gospel also speaks of this capacity of Jesus to attract people: the context is that of the Paschal feast, in which, among the many going up to Jerusalem, there are also some Greeks who want to see Jesus.

The story is quite unique: the Greeks talk about it with Philip, Philip speaks with Andrew about it, then Philip and Andrew told it to Jesus (Jn 12:21-22). And eventually all the characters disappear, and we don't know how the story ended, whether the Greeks did or did not meet Jesus. The answer however is there and it is precisely the passage we have heard and above all towards the conclusion at v. 32 ("I will draw all to myself"). To the request of being able to see Him, Jesus responds by saying that all will see Him when He will be lifted up from the earth and He will draw all to Himself. Jesus reveals the profound logic that has animated His entire existence and that will end in the hour of His passion, which has almost come (cf. 2,4; 7,30). He does it by recounting a very short parable, that of the grain of wheat: "unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn 12:24).

In these few lines is hidden a novelty that surprises us, one for which Jesus says there are two logics with which it is possible to live: one is the logic of solitude, the other is that of communion. Within this perspective, Jesus interprets His passion and resurrection.

A life held fast, a life closed in on and concentrated on self, is a life that remains alone, which knows only the narrow spaces of one's self. And it is destined to end. A life lost for others, a life that loves and gives itself, is a life that enters into the logic of relationship, and it is a life that is fulfilled.

Jesus knows well that to choose the logic of communion has a price, and the price is His death, the surrendering of Himself to the hands of those who can do with Him what they will do; and facing this prospect He is deeply troubled (Jn 12:27).

But He also knows that He is in greater and stronger hands, in the hand of the Father, hands faithful to true glory, to true life: in the face of Jesus choice to go to the end of the way of communion, the Father confirms the choice to not abandon the only beloved Son, and makes His voice heard (Jn 12:28). He glorified His own name, and will continue to do so.

What does it mean? What is this name? The name of God is "Father": Jesus, in the Gospel of John, repeats it countless times. Well, God will continue to be Father, to be The One who gives life. He will not leave the Son alone, because with the Son He shares the same logic of communion and love, which is why their relationship cannot die.

The hour of the passion, at this point, becomes the hour of glory (Jn 12:23), the hour of full revelation of truth, that is of the love of God: a love so great and strong as to be able to change death into life, the end into a new beginning. Jesus will be “lifted up” (Jn 13:32): a single word to say both the cross and the glory, because cross and glory are, from now on, inseparable.

And from this lifting up a new people will be born, to which all can join: “And I, when I will be lifted from earth, I will draw all to me” (Jn 12:32).

All those who feel in the intimacy of their heart the profound attraction that a love like this can arouse, beyond every apparent defeat and failure, enter a new logic of life, and follow the Lord, there where He is (Jn 12:26).

Last Sunday we were invited to look upon the serpent lifted up in the desert (Jn 3:14), to obtain healing and life. Today, we are asked to look once again on Jesus raised on the cross, our salvation.

If the gaze remains fixed on Him, in this continual need of salvation, we will experience its power of at-traction, which saves us from the many dis-tractions of life and unites us in the single profound desire of communion and love, with Him and among us.

+Pierbattista

https://www.lpj.org/latin-patriarch/meditation-patriarch-pizzaballa-solemnity-of-the-mostholy-trinity-year-b.htm